

PROSPECTS COLLEGE OF ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY



029 Learners First Strategy

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1. Background to the Learners First Strategy

- 1.1 The Learners First Strategy has been created by the Director of Learning following the completion of a research project carried out as part of the Digital Learning Fellowship where 116 PROCAT learners took part in focus groups to share their views on learner expectations and experiences. The strategy has been developed directly from the learner voice gathered during the research project. The research report from the project is available to read here:

<http://procatdigital.co.uk/resources/PROCAT%20Digital%20Student%20Report/HTML/index.html>

- 1.2 Every recommendation outlined in the above report was addressed and implemented and the project was hugely beneficial to the college in defining strategic projects.

- 1.3 A magazine was also produced for staff, which documented the top 20 ways to engage learners, as advised by PROCAT learners. The magazine is available to read here:

<http://procatdigital.co.uk/resources/PROCAT%20Engaging%20Students%20Report/HTML/index.html>

- 1.4 PROCAT is committed to putting students first by listening and responding to their views. Research increasingly suggests that when learners are engaged in shaping and leading their own learning and education this can result in benefits for all learners, educators, the institution and the education system as a whole. Learners' involvement develops a greater sense of ownership over their learning, increased motivation, improved self-esteem, greater achievement, better relationships with peers and staff and increased self-efficacy.

- 1.5 The purpose of this strategy is to document how PROCAT puts the learner first and engages with learners. The processes for learner voice are documented and the need

to enhance the process. The potential role of digital technologies to empower all learners is also outlined. Recommendations are made which will be implemented by the Director of Learning.

2. The Strategic and College Context

2.1 To continue to be successful in the Further Education environment PROCAT needs its adaptive capacity to increase. The principles we will adopt as we adapt include: putting benefit to students at the heart of our decision-making, in addition to employers; getting rid of unnecessary complexity, ensuring we continue to innovate so that we provide outstanding teaching and learning and putting our effort and resources into the things that matter most to our learners, alongside employers.

2.2 **Learners need:**

- Their learning to enhance their life choices in social and economic terms
- To learn at a time, place and pace that suits their needs
- Life-changing learning that enables them to realise their life and career ambitions and fulfil their potential
- To operate in a knowledge-building learning community that values diversity and multiple perspectives

2.3 **Employers need:**

- Apprentices who have relevant knowledge and skills that can be directly applied in the workplace

2.4 **Society needs:**

- PROCAT to truly deliver value by increasing the social, economic and cultural capital of the greatest number of people

- 2.5 The Learners First Strategy builds on ideas (and subsequent student feedback) first presented over the summer 2015 in the digital learning fellowship research project. It seeks to address how we might remain true to our mission of creating work ready students for a technical, professional career and deliver our potential to do even more for our learners in a changing and challenging external environment.
- 2.6 Learners are becoming more and more demanding in a rapidly changing environment and in an age of students as consumers, demanding value. Employability is central to PROCAT's learners' needs. Transformative learning technology – flexibility and personalisation are fundamental expectations.
- 2.7 This strategy has been developed with the needs of learners, employers, staff and wider society. It reflects PROCAT's own capabilities and aspirations and considers the challenges in the external environment:
- A world of competition – new providers, trailblazers, universities offering lower level courses.
 - Reduction in funding
 - Area Reviews
 - Technology – disrupting existing models and enabling other providers to replicate
 - Increasing divergence across Further Education

3. Priorities and Targets

3.1 PROCAT will support learners in achieving their diverse study goals.

3.2 Key improvement actions and target:

- Construct a coherent orientation and induction experience for enquirers, new learners and existing learners progressing within PROCAT.
- Generate coherent learner engagement strategies within and around formal curriculum.
- Ensure that necessary data is easily accessible and provides a relevant format against all initiatives in order that key learning and teaching decisions are scholarly in nature and informed by evidence.
- The latest student satisfaction survey shows 78.8% of learners are satisfied. As a result of this strategy, the target is 85% by September 2016.

3.3 In practice this means:

- Developing activities in order to engage learners in a community of learners. Feedback from the focus groups was that learners did not want to be represented through a student union or council, but rather collectively with their peers, as a group.
- Putting the student voice at the heart of the online student experience through a Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) network, an online student experience for learning through a 24/7 virtual learning environment (VLE) and tracking of progress and evidence of learning through OneFile, the college's e-portfolio.
- Development of an improved induction for new starts and progressing students, which also includes a pre-induction for students to be able to practice using college systems before they arrive, have access to a sample area of the VLE, assess their skills and sample course materials.

4. Annual Focus Groups for all levels of PROCAT Learners

- 4.1 An annual research study takes place by the Director of Learning to investigate students' expectations and experiences at PROCAT, including the use of digital technology. The results of the research study are fed into PROCAT's learning strategy.
- 4.2 The study is college wide for learners at all levels from level 1 through to advanced apprenticeships. In May – June 2015, 116 students took part in the study.
- 4.3 The annual study is structured around three activities. The first is a questionnaire for students to complete, the second is a card sorting activity and finally a focus group Q&A session.
- 4.4 The card activity asks four questions based on four different themes. Each of the items for sorting are presented on individual cards for the students to discuss and rank in their priority of importance.
- 4.5 This research study is carried out using resources from the Jisc Digital Student project. The resources are available from this reference: Jisc (2015) Conducting learner experience focus groups [Online] Available from:<http://digitalstudent.jiscinvolve.org/wp/2015/02/19/conducting-learner-experience-focus-groups>
- 4.6 This study ensured the involvement of students and the development of their student voice. When implementing new projects, it is vital to have student representation from the start.
- 4.7 This annual research study provides the opportunity to measure learner voice through the data collection and analysis. Learners are consulted through the focus groups and able to express their opinions as part of a shared forum. They are involved and able to contribute to decisions and make suggestions about strategic developments.

- 4.8 Through the focus groups, learners are empowered and work directly in partnership with the Director of Learning and the rest of the college.

5. Digital Learning Ambassadors

- 5.1 A Digital Learning Ambassador Scholarship was introduced at PROCAT. The Digital Learning Ambassadors are a team of five. The recruitment of the Digital Learning Ambassadors replicates the process of entering paid employment. Applicants have to complete an application form and attend an interview.
- 5.2 The Digital Learning Ambassadors create a documented charter for each project they work on defining aims and objectives, goals and measures. Weekly challenges are set.
- 5.3 The Digital Learning Ambassadors maintain a learning portfolio where they reflect on what went well and what did not go so well, each week and record evidence of employability skills, for example, planning, problem solving and communication skills.
- 5.4 The team are self-organising, holding team meetings. Their role is to develop digital skills, build confidence, trial new digital tools, co-create resources, train, advise and support, collaborate and share.
- 5.5 The Digital Learning Ambassadors contribute to the learner voice and take part in learning walks with the Director of Learning to make recommendations on how digital learning technology can be used effectively in the classroom.
- 5.6 The digital learning ambassadors are supported with training and meet on a regular basis with the Director of Learning. Their first project focused on introducing the use of LinkedIn across the college to develop a professional digital footprint and engage with employers.

5.7 The DLAs maintain their own website. This section details links to resources:

Visit: <http://digiambassadors.procatdigital.co.uk>

Twitter Feed @DigiAmbassadors and hashtag #DigitalAmbassadors

Poster:

<http://www.procatdigital.co.uk/images/procat/blog/Digital%20Learning%20Scholarship%20Poster.pdf>

Scholarship application form:

<http://www.procatdigital.co.uk/images/procat/blog/Digital%20Learning%20Scholarship%20Application%20Form.pdf>

Digital Learning Ambassadors Portfolio:

<http://procatdigital.co.uk/resources/digital%20learning%20ambassadors%20portfolio.pdf>

Project Charter:

<http://procatdigital.co.uk/resources/charter%201%20LinkedIn.pdf>

Digital Learning Ambassador Role Poster:

<http://procatdigital.co.uk/resources/digital%20learning%20ambassadors%20poster.pdf>

LinkedIn Setup Guide

<http://procatdigital.co.uk/resources/LinkedIn%20set%20up%20guide.pdf>

Why Used LinkedIn? Flyer

<http://procatdigital.co.uk/resources/why%20used%20linkedin.pdf>

6. E-Portfolio System

6.1 PROCAT are implementing an ePortfolio system with a planned full implementation for September 2016, which works online and offline and accessible via an app. Use of the ePortfolio system provides a single place for monitoring and tracking learner progress and includes dashboards for visual representation of progress. It is a secure storage unit for learners' work and enables rapid interaction with the learner for both the college and employer.

- 6.2 Learners benefit from using an ePortfolio because there is no risk of losing their work or evidence. It provides live progress data, task and gaps directly to the learner, which they access through an app on any device at any time. It provides learners with full control and visibility of their learning progress.
- 6.3 It enables employers to track the progress of their apprentices and view and contribute to learner reviews. Employers are also able to fill identified evidence gaps with appropriate training and skills development.
- 6.4 The same login to the ePortfolio is used to access the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). The ePortfolio is an end to end assessment tool, endorsed by many awarding bodies and includes NVQ, QCF, BTEC assessment workflows. It negates the need for paper portfolios and integrates with the college's MIS system.

7. Bring Your Own Device

- 7.1 PROCAT introduced the ability to 'bring your own' (BYO) devices in September 2015 based on the [JISC BYOD policy](#). Students are now able to bring their own device and use the college network to access OneFile for their e-portfolio, the VLE, other learning resources and documents stored on the cloud.
- 7.2 The BYOD policy is summarised in poster format around the college. Students wishing to use their own devices must first download software, so that college policies on internet safety and anti-virus can be followed. Download speeds are controlled, to protect network performance.

- 7.3 The work was informed by a working group comprising representatives from IT, Senior Management and Teaching Staff and with input from students through the digital student focus groups.
- 7.4 The initial problem to be addressed was increasing the IT access/capacity for students, ensuring sustainability and achieving equality of the digital environment inside and outside college. The solution was BYOD.
- 7.5 Alternatives were considered: do nothing, more computer suites or issue hardware to students. Do nothing was not option, more computer suites were not delivering a solution for the future and issuing hardware to students would inevitably not please everyone who would want choice in their device. Students who do not have their own device are able to book the use of a laptop or use machines within the learning resource zones based at each campus.
- 7.6 Practical considerations included IT infrastructure, security, filtering, management, policies and equality. The BYOD network is separate to the college network. It is completely open with the exception of illegal sites which are blocked.
- 7.7 Use of the BYOD network is governed by the policy Bring Your Own Device as well as the existing policies on Information Technology and e-Safety and Data Protection.

8. Embedding Equality and Diversity through Learner Voice

- 8.1 PROCAT have rebranded Equality and Diversity to recapture staff and students' imagination. We call it OneWorld to embrace the whole of E&D: "Our New Emerging World of Respecting Life and Differences - Where the gap between you and the working world is not widened because of who you are".

PROCAT wants their students to stand out because they have holistic values.

- 8.2 Padlet was the chosen tool to communicate equality, diversity and British values. Padlet is an electronic noticeboard for collaborating, creating and sharing resources. It has been added as a shortcut on everybody's desktop, on the intranet and monthly desktop wallpaper change which communicates the current month's OneWorld discussion topic.
- 8.3 Padlet is used because it is a flexible and easy tool for staff and students to use, in order, to deal with more difficult subjects in life. It provides a range of resources which staff and students can choose – video clips, websites
- 8.4 It provides current, relevant news that is continuously added to by Staff and Students. Students have also been creating their own resources to add to the bank of resources and using their learner voice to contribute to a bank of resources.
- 8.5 Through padlet all staff and students can access a pool of resources with notes and timings as a guide. It also provides freedom for students to choose their own resources, females choosing different resources to males, which provides learner choice.

9. National Union of Students

- 9.1 Anant Naik, Digital Editor at the National Union of Students and Adam Wright, a member of the NUS policy team visited PROCAT in January 2016. They spent the

afternoon with the Director of Learning and spent time with a range of staff to learn more about the work of PROCAT and also with a focus on learner voice.

- 9.2 The feedback from the NUS representatives was very positive and they advised that many initiatives they see set up in colleges with regards to student unions and representation is to address the lack of learner voice. NUS highlighted that because of activity, which is seen as normal business at PROCAT, such as the way learners are involved in embedding equality and diversity, taking part in student focus groups, having a direct voice with the Principal and Director of Learning at lunch time meetings – there is not the need for a specific learner council or union.

10. STEM Ambassadors

- 10.1 Some learners become STEM Ambassadors and undertake public speaking assignments in schools and to other audiences. PROCAT learners attend schools and events to encourage young people to progress a career in STEM subjects.
- 10.2 The Ambassadors are also involved in clubs held at the college for school children. A Saturday construction club ran over the summer holidays for six weeks and the Young Engineers Club provided young people with the chance to learn basic engineering skills which including soldering, wiring, programming and creating a metal dice and desk tidy.

11. Student Surveys

- 11.1 We limit the amount of student surveys because feedback from the learner focus groups revealed learners disliked surveys because it requires an individual response. Learners reported they like to provide feedback as a group, so that they can gain ideas from each other and share views.

- 11.2 The latest student satisfaction survey shows 78.8% of learners are satisfied.
- 11.3 Posters are displayed throughout the college to provide responses to learner feedback through the “You Said, We Did” campaign.

12. Learner Talks, Forums and Special Events

- 12.1 A number of talks take place throughout the academic year to focus on particular topics of interest and for safety. The Student Support Manager meets all the female students once a term to gather feedback and provide a specific voice for females. There are also other specialist group forums held, for example, for learners with reasonable adjustments.
- 12.2 There are speakers who attend college to run talks for learners, for example, safe driving, drugs awareness and E-safety.
- 12.3 On the 9th February 2016, the college held a “Safer Internet Day”. This is coordinated by the UK Safer Internet Centre. All teaching staff delivered a lesson on safe internet use, social networking and safeguarding. A poster campaign was seen across the college and social media was utilised to share messages.
- 12.4 PROCAT learners also take part in events and visits, for example, Motor Vehicle learners visited Ford Dagenham.

13. Student Governor

- 13.1 All learners are invited to make nominations for the Student Governor.

- 13.2 It has to be noted through that the voluntary nominations for student governors are sparse and this process is not popular. This is because students do not favour single representation and much prefer feedback to be as part of a whole learning community.

14. Learner Group Discussions

- 14.1 As a result of the student focus groups detailed in section 4 and the feedback from the learners on their strong desire to communicate as a whole learning community, class discussions have been implemented. This enables learners to discuss Equality and Diversity issues and other subjects and have an outlet to share experiences and expectations, direct with their instructor.

15. Principal Lunches

- 15.1 Fortnightly 20-minute lunch time meets have been implemented and alternate between the Principal and the Director of Learning. Students rotate around, so that all learners have an opportunity to have a direct voice with the Principal or Director of Learning.
- 15.2 This initiative removes barriers and involves learners as a learning community. This forum allows learners to come up with solutions and explore future plans.

16. Learning Walks

- 16.1 A set schedule of learning walks has been implemented carried out by the Director of Learning, Quality Manager, Heads and Deputy Heads of Faculty on a weekly basis at each campus. In addition to three learning walks taking place per week, the Quality Manager is carrying out a learning walk on a daily basis, rotating around each campus.
- 16.2 The feedback from staff has been very positive with regards to the learning walks and the results have been pleasing. Results on the learning walks show that learners are clear on their progress, have strong career progression either to employment or further study.
- 16.3 Learners are directly questioned during learning walks and the results are reviewed at the fortnightly quality meeting and actions implemented as appropriate.

17. Staff Representatives for Learner Voice

- 17.1 The Director of Learning is a dedicated learner liaison officer on the senior management team whose role includes quality and curriculum issues, as well as, concerns for learners.
- 17.2 The college has a dedicated Student Support Manager and Safeguarding Officer who meets with the Director of Learning on a weekly basis.

- 17.3 The Faculty Coordinator leads on learner voice initiatives, working in collaboration with the Director of Learning. The two meet monthly to progress learner voice initiatives. A detailed research project was carried out by the Faculty Coordinator with an associated report published. The research included the Faculty Coordinator visiting other institutions to learn from best practice taking place elsewhere. The findings of the research project are incorporated into the recommendations in this strategy.

18. Noticeboards

- 18.1 The Quality Manager is responsible for communicating key data to learners on the noticeboards at each campus. The information reports on how learners are progressing as a whole, across the college and key performance indicators, for example, how well attendance is across the college and information about learner progression and careers.

19. Digital Learning

- 19.1 Digital technology is embedded in curriculum design with students creating their own resources. Students are empowered to collaborate, carry out research and shape their learning through digital technology. Learners have the ability to demonstrate their learning and provide learning evidence through a variety of media.
- 19.2 Technology used by learners includes padlet, socrative, raspberry pi and robotics programming, use of video, animation and photography, creation of posters, use of padlet, CAD, use of Microsoft office such as powerpoint and word.

20. Recommendations to be implemented by the Director of Learning

- 20.1 A CPD leader is being appointed to the college. An area of responsibility for the CPD Leader is to ensure staff have opportunities for professional development around encouraging learner voice activities. Staff will benefit from understanding issues from a learner perspective.
- 20.2 Mystery Shopper Approach – Learners are appointed as mystery shoppers, but for outstanding learning rather than a customer service shopping experience, where this concept is familiar. Learners will be anonymous and instructors will never know when a ‘mystery shopper’ ie. Learner will be reporting on their learning experience.
- 20.3 Before students start, we can identify their tech requirements and discover how technology can help them as a student and if they have particular requirements / need additional support. It is recommended to develop an active pre-induction online community where students can meet, speak to existing students and staff, take virtual tours and begin building their digital identity and start their e-portfolio / CV for life. Before they arrive, learners would know what digital content and services are available and how they can log in and start being fed with news and messages, bite size introductory work pieces, quizzes and receive motivational messages and handy hints and tips before they start etc. Learners will be able to practice using college systems before they arrive.
- 20.4 The implementation of a robust induction for both new starters and progressing students which develops employability skills for 2020.
- 20.5 The establishment of a virtual library on the virtual learning environment (VLE) is currently being developed. The Director of Learning is leading on this project in collaboration with Jisc Library and Digital Resources Specialists. This will enable learners to have their own research voice.

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- 20.6 The virtual learning is also developing a help centre for learners to gain skills in independent learning and 'learning to learn' skills. Learners are to be guided in how to carry out effective independent learning to improve their success rates.
- 20.7 Work in collaboration with employers to build the virtual learning environment in conjunction with employer feedback and resources. Employers want apprentices who have relevant knowledge and skills that can be directly applied in the workplace.